

I'll Never Let You Fall

by Terri1

Category: Nightwing

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-02-01 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-02-01 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 12:52:00

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,068

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The night after she is shot by the Joker, Barbara Gordon gets a visitor in the hospital

I'll Never Let You Fall

Disclaimer: I own nothing here, all the characters contained within the story are owned by DC Comics. I make no money and write only for my own enjoyment and that of others, so lawsuits against poor me will be fruitless.

Author's Note: This is written in response to a challenge set out by Syl Francis on the "Nightwing" mailing list. Though the challenge was made to someone else in response to their comment that Dick's reaction to Barbara's shooting had never been shown in the books, it tickled my brain. So here goes everything. Feedback to gabi@gies.com

I'll Never Let You Fall by Terri Hayes

Monitors flickered silently next to the fragile figure on the bed, the only sound in the room a quiet hiss of oxygen. A shadow moved deeper into the darkness outside the window, watching as the night nurse took a pulse and noted it on the chart she carried. Careful hands smoothed the blankets over the still form, and then the nurse left as quietly as she'd come.

When the room was empty, the figure outside finally moved. Melting from the shadows of the night to materialize on the window ledge itself, he efficiently popped the screen from its moorings and let himself into the room. The midnight shift at the hospital was always quiet, the rooms shrouded in just enough darkness for the patients to sleep but with still enough light for the nurses to work by. The soft

glow of the low lighting would hide the after-hours visitor from the eagle eye of the night nurse.

Hovering near the open window for a long moment, just another indistinct blur in the night, the figure simply listened to the soft breathing of the bed's occupant. When he finally stepped forward to the side of the bed and lowered himself into the chair near her, Nightwing's knees were shaking.

He reached up to remove the mask from his face with a heavily gauntleted hand, and Dick Grayson's anguish became visible in the cerulean blue of his eyes as he looked on his one-time partner. Peeling the weighted glove from his arm and hand, Dick slid his hand into Barbara's gently. It broke his heart to see her like this, so frail and hurt, instead of laughing and soaring through the night sky next to him like she used to.

She'd been contemplating retirement, he knew. Feeling as if she'd lost her edge. He didn't know if she'd finally decided before this or not... but now she would have no choice. Barbara Gordon, AKA Batgirl, would never walk again. Dick dropped his eyes to her hand, clasped in his, and let the tears fall.

< The phone ringing in Titans Tower wasn't strange. Donna's serious expression and coming personally to deliver a message was unusual, though. Generally, messages were bellowed through the intercom. She'd stood in the doorway of the gymnasium watching Dick Grayson fly through the air as if born with wings, waiting until he'd noticed her.

Donna was already hurting for him, she didn't know how to break the news of Barbara's injury. Nightwing landed next to her with a flourish, and exuberantly said, "Ta da! The last of the Flying Graysons!"

Donna winced, wishing she didn't have to be the one to end his exuberant good mood, and then sighed softly. "Dick.. I have some news for you."

Her serious demeanor warned him that it wouldn't be good news, and his tone grew wary. "What happened?"

"Alfred called, Dick." She hastened onward as Dick's expression hardened. "It's not Bruce... it's your friend, Barbara Gordon."

Dick's immediate tension was almost palpable. "What about Barbara? Is she all right?"

Donna paused, searching for the right words. "She's in the hospital, Dick. Alfred didn't give me all the details except to say that she's stable. But that you should come home as soon as you can." She laid a hand on his arm supportively, "I'll go with you, if you like."

For a moment, it almost looked as if Dick might not react. The only indication of his shock was the pallor of his skin. He choked suddenly, though, and replied, "No... I'll go. I'll leave now."

Too stunned and scared to go straight to the hospital, Dick arrived at Wayne Manor in record time. Alfred was waiting for him at the door. "Master Dick, I'm sorry you had to come home under these conditions. Master Bruce is downstairs, he said he'd rather give you the details himself."

Dick nodded, a faint smile forced out for his friend and confidante. "Thanks, Alfred." He hugged the older man tightly, and then moved quickly to the secret passage that would take him down to the BatCave. Descending the stairs two at a time, he stopped as he reached the bottom to take a shaky breath and run a hand through his hair. It wouldn't do for Bruce to see just how badly this had rattled him.

Approaching the computer consoles where Bruce worked, Dick knew that his mentor and guardian heard him. He stopped several paces back. Bruce said simply, "Welcome home, Dick."

'God,' Dick thought in worry, 'he sounds so tired. Bruce is never tired.' "I got Alfred's message and came back as soon as I could. What happened?" Dick's tone was almost a demand, laced with fear and concern.

"She's stable." Bruce turned his chair so that he could see his former protege, his expression neutral. It wasn't until Dick got a good look at his eyes that he realized just how bad the situation was.

"What _happened_?"

"The Joker." Bruce leaned his head back and tiredly rubbed his face. "He's back in Arkham now. But I didn't get to him before he got to Jim and Barbara."

Dick shook with fury, but his voice was preternaturally cold and contained. "How bad?"

Bruce looked up, his dark eyes haunted by his failure to protect. "He waltzed up to their front door and just rang the bell. He shot her in the stomach as she opened the door. She probably won't walk again, Dick. The bullet shattered her spine. Even had the Joker not then moved her around multiple times, the damage was extensive."

The rage flooding Dick's body abruptly changed to horror and he paled visibly, dropping into a nearby chair. "Oh my god. Babs won't... walk?" His thoughts became chaotic. It took long minutes to work his way through the initial haze.

Many questions came to mind. Where the hell was Batman when the Joker was knocking on the Commissioner's door? Had anyone even warned Gordon that the Joker was on the loose? What did Bruce mean "moved her around multiple times"? When he looked up at Bruce, the heated words demanding answers and condemning the man for not capturing the Joker sooner died on his lips. Bruce was already punishing himself far more than Dick ever could.

"It wasn't your fault, Bruce. You couldn't have known." Dick paused and asked softly, "Are they allowing her visitors?"

Bruce shook his head negatively, "No one but family today and tomorrow. Jim's been there since I rescued him."

Dick nodded and climbed to his feet, "Fine." He left it at that, and headed for the stairs of Wayne Manor. Nothing was going to keep him from Barbara's side.

Bruce watched the young man go, fully aware of his intentions. He returned his eyes to the computer console which he'd hidden from Dick by keeping the focus on himself. The photos of Barbara were too vivid for Dick's anguish. They were too vivid for him, too, but they were his penance for failing again.>>

IN THE PRESENT...

A light squeeze of his hand brought Dick's eyes open, sending them flying to Barbara's face. Her green eyes hazy with painkillers, Barbara smiled at him and whispered, "Dick? ... What are you doing here?"

Dick couldn't help but smile in return, hoping she couldn't see the evidence of his tears in the low light. His voice was soft as he quipped gently, "Oh, let's see.... I like the food. Yeah, that's it." He winked at her, "You don't think it's possibly because I heard that you needed me, do you?"

Barbara hmm'd, vaguely amused in spite of the slowness of her thought processes. "Nah... that couldn't possibly drag the famous Titan from New York."

She squeezed his hand again, and he squeezed back this time. "Nah, you're right. I came to yell at you." He shrugged a little, trying so hard to keep it light for her. "I had to find out from Alfred that you were passionately crying out my name all the way here, so I came to make sure that whatever you did, you weren't naming me the father."

Barbara started to giggle just a little at that one, stifling it quickly with a glance toward the far side of the room.

Nightwing's eyes swung in the same direction, and he kicked himself mentally. How the hell did he miss that Jim Gordon was asleep on a cot in the corner of the room?? When he turned his eyes back to Barbara, he looked sheepish, "Now see what you did? I was in such a hurry to get to you, I didn't even see your bodyguard."

Barbara's smile was faint. "Dad's been here for hours." She paused, swallowing hard as her eyes fell closed again. "I'm glad you're here, Dick... Bruce will need you."

Looking surprised, Dick had to bite his tongue for a minute. "Bruce? Bruce won't need me, Barbara." He flushed slightly, "You need me, though."

Barbara's expression turned pained and she forced her eyes open to meet his. "Dick.... I appreciate you coming all this way to see me, but... I don't want you to stay out of pity for the cripple." Her eyes flooded with tears, "I'm going to have plenty of that for the rest of my life. Please, don't blame yourself. And don't blame Bruce either, he'll do enough of that himself without any help."

Dick glanced toward the Commissioner, who seemed to be deeply asleep. Probably exhausted from the events of the day and the emotional toll, but that was good. It allowed the two of them to speak freely to one another. "Babs, you know I can't talk him out of blaming himself," he said as he returned his gaze to hers. "And I don't pity you. I'm sorry that it happened to you, and I want to help you get back on yo..." He blushed at the faux pas. "Get back to work and to your life."

Barbara's smile was just a little bitter. "My life, Boy Blunder?" Her other hand moved to cradle his cheek, taking the sting from the slam on his inadvertent use of the phrase 'on your feet.' "My life will never be the same again. Retiring as Batgirl was a choice that I had already made, but this wasn't quite what I had in mind. And I have to learn to live with the fact that I'm a cripple, all by myself. I can't do it with anyone's help."

She seemed to be coping well with the news of the paralysis. As drugged out on painkillers as she was though, Dick didn't think it had quite sunk in yet. The drastic changes, what it would mean to her life. She would have difficult days ahead and knowing her as well as he did, he had a feeling that she wasn't going to recover nearly as quickly emotionally as she'd want everyone to think. And it was highly unlikely that she'd let anyone close enough to help her without a fight.

Dick turned his cheek into her hand, still holding her other one in his ungloved fingers. "I know, Babs. But I want you to know that I'm *always* going to be here for you."

Barbara nodded slightly, the exertion of speaking taking its toll on her in combination with the painkillers in her IV. She closed her eyes and murmured softly, "I know that, Dick." Her hand slipped from his face to lie across her chest, and Dick gently laid it down flat on the bed. He leaned downward to kiss the hand he was still holding, whispering almost inaudibly, "God, Barbara, I'm so sorry for not being here."

She stirred in response, murmuring sleepily, "Don't." Barbara forced her eyes open one more time, her expression one of drowsy affection as she fought the effects of the sedative. "I knew you'd find a way to blame yourself or him. It was dumb luck, no one's fault." Her eyes drifted closed again as the sedatives won the battle.

He hoped she still felt that way when she wasn't on painkillers, though he doubted either he or Bruce would ever forgive themselves for not stopping this from happening somehow. His thoughts took him back across the years of their partnership, and fixed on one particular moment. He moved his chair to kiss her cheek and stroke it gently, whispering into her ear, "Dream of me, Babs... of flying... I'll never let you fall."

His whispered words echoed through her dreams...

<<"I won't let you fall."

Batgirl looked at her young partner apprehensively, "Robin, I'm really not sure that I'm ready for this jump yet."

They stood atop the thirty-two story Wayne Enterprises building in downtown Gotham, with two batlines. Only seconds before, each of them had sent the lines across the road to grapple onto the forty story Gotham National Bank building, and now they stood at what looked to be the edge of an abyss, ready to jump.

Robin's eyes twinkled as he looked at Batgirl, "You're ready. You've been ready, you just have to have faith. In yourself, and in me. I'll *never* let you fall."

Batgirl looked down again, and then took a deep breath and nodded. "Now or never, and I'm not a coward."

Robin laughed softly, "That's the attitude you need. Ready... set... GO!"

Batgirl leapt off the roof with an "OOOOHHHHHH MMMYYYY GOOOOOOOOOOD!" squeal of terror and closed her eyes as she fell, holding on to the line for dear life. Robin went off the roof on his own line, right behind her, and suddenly he was just ... there. An arm around her waist, holding onto his own line with only one arm. His teasing voice sounded in her ear, whispering, "Feel it, Babs? It's as close to free as you'll ever be in this lifetime."

Batgirl's eyes popped open as the slack played out and the two jump lines began to catch hold, easing their descent into a graceful arc that would take them swinging around the corner of the bank building. Her heart was pounding so fast, she thought it would come right out of her chest. But oh God... he was right... she was *FREE*. It was indescribable.

As the strong cables carried the two forms upward, Batgirl's laughter rang out. She was invincible. Unbeatable. Robin flew with her, protecting and yet letting her know that it was her own control that guided the flight. When two pairs of boots settled to the rooftop of Markham's Department store, next to the bank, Batgirl was still breathless and laughing.

Robin thought he'd never seen anything so beautiful in his life, and he impulsively leaned forward to kiss her. Caught up in the moment, the sheer love of being alive and the exhilaration of careening with daredevil style across Gotham's skyline, Batgirl kissed him back passionately.

When the moment passed, both backed up and blushed vividly. "I'm sorry, Robin. That..." Batgirl grinned, "Oh my God, that was amazing! I've never felt so free... you were right."

Robin wasn't as quick to recover, gaping at the woman in front of him. Then his roguish grin reappeared. "I told you. C'mon, you need more practice." They spent the night soaring above the dark landscape of Gotham City.>>

In her sleep, Barbara's lips quirked into a faint smile. As if protecting her, a Robin flew over her shoulder in her dreams and she was safe. Whole. Strong. Free.

Dick stood up slowly, softly stroking Barbara's cheek. "Sleep well." Shoving his hand back into the heavy gauntlet and securing his mask again, Dick Grayson once again became Nightwing. He left the room on

whisper-soft feet, as silent in departure as he'd been on arrival.

Jim Gordon opened his eyes several long moments after the window latched, and stared at the ceiling. He only slept in fits anyway, but he'd known as soon as he heard the faint click of the screen opening that he needed to be asleep. Either Batman or someone else obviously needed privacy for a visit, and he wouldn't intrude.

The things you learn when you're not asleep. Young Grayson had deeper feelings for Barbara than Jim had ever suspected. He wondered if the boy even realized them, though guessed he probably didn't. It was good to know that Barbara had such strong support, though. Only the men with whom she'd worked her nighttime capers would understand truly what she'd lost.

Jim climbed quietly to his feet to go touch his daughter's face gently. In a soft whisper, he told her, "I know you can't talk to me. I know you won't talk to almost anyone else, baby. But I hope you take advantage of the friends who love you to help you work through this. It's going to be such a different life." He sighed softly, kissing her forehead gently, and went back to the cot. Resuming his vigil, staring at the ceiling, Jim Gordon stood guard over his daughter's sleep.

End
file.